

Crown Him Lo

(A DISCUSSION OF THE CHRISTIAN'S ATTITUDE)

by

ERNEST FREMONT

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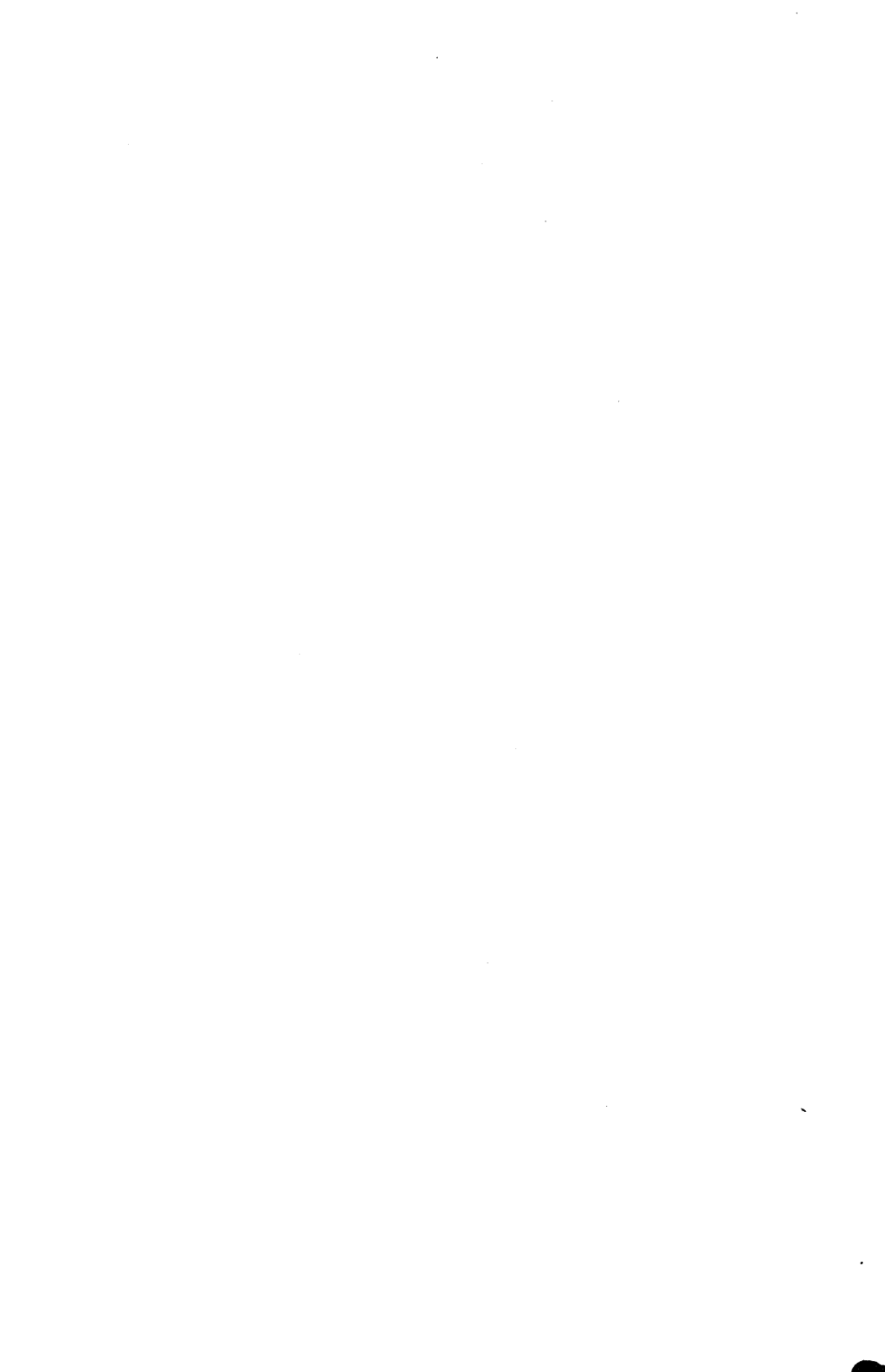
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CROWN HIM LORD OF ALL

by

ERNEST FREMONT TITTLE

A Sermon preached in the First Methodist Episcopal Church,
Evanston, Illinois, April 6, 1924.

"He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me." Matthew 10:37.

To the question, What is your supreme loyalty? there is, I venture to think, only one answer which those of us who are gathered here this morning would be willing to give. One after another, would we not promptly and unequivocally answer, My supreme loyalty is to Jesus Christ?

This answer would be given by those among us whose faith in Christ rests upon the authority of the holy catholic church with its nineteen centuries of persistent witness to the lordship of Jesus. And it would be given with equal fervor by those of us whose faith in Christ rests upon the conviction that the accumulating experience of mankind has proved that Jesus is, indeed, the Lord of life. We verily believe that only in him is there fullness of life for the individual or for the world.

And so we are ready this morning to pledge our supreme allegiance to Jesus Christ. In answer to the question, "Do you confess Him as your Lord and Master?" we would say, as one of our number actually did say a few minutes ago, "I do." Some of us might say it with a certain lightness of heart. Others might say it with a very considerable searching of heart. Some of us might say it without thinking through the implications of our avowal. Others might say it with a fairly clear notion of the possible costliness of such an avowal. But to hundreds of us there would seem to be no other possible answer that we could bring ourselves to make. We cannot but repeat after Jesus himself that searching saying, "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me." Nor can we fail to see that although, in this saying, only two great human relationships are mentioned, others are implied. He, for instance, that loveth his university more than Christ is not worthy of Christ. He that loveth his country more than Christ is not worthy of Christ. Are not these admissions also involved? And who among us would hesitate to make them?

When Jesus said, "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me," he was, of course, thinking of himself not

merely as a human individual, but as a spiritual symbol of the kingdom of God. Supreme loyalty to him meant supreme loyalty to the kingdom of God in heaven and on earth. And let us keep steadily before us the important fact that *when a man pledges supreme loyalty to the kingdom of God, far from surrendering any lesser loyalty, he glorifies every other loyalty.*

When, for instance, a man takes the position that his supreme loyalty is not to his wife nor to his children, but to Jesus Christ, does his family lose by such an allegiance? Does it not rather gain by it all those splendid spiritual values which, down the centuries, have made every truly Christian home a place of refuge and of inspiration? John Bunyan went to jail rather than be untrue to his conscience. He did not enjoy the thought of going to jail. He said, "The parting of my wife and poor children hath often been to me in this place as the pulling of flesh off my bones." One of his children was blind; and he said that the thought of the hardships this poor blind one might be called upon to undergo almost broke his heart to pieces. Yet, in loyalty to his convictions, he remained in Bedford jail twelve years. Did his family suffer by reason of his supreme allegiance to Christ? In one sense, Yes. But only in the sense of physical hardship; only in the sense of physical separation. Never in the sense of spiritual tragedy; never in the sense of spiritual separation. *And in respect of all those noble spiritual loyalties which bind one human soul to other human souls until death, and beyond death, and which dignify and glorify domestic relationships, the Bunyan family gained by this supreme allegiance to Christ.*

Did the family as an institution suffer by reason of this one man's decision to go to jail rather than be untrue to his own conscience? Were any divorces occasioned by it? Were husbands who learned of John Bunyan's incarceration for conscience' sake tempted by reason of it to be disloyal to their wives? Were fathers who heard of his courageous stand for principle led by reason of it to neglect their children? Did any single home in England suffer spiritual shipwreck because of John Bunyan's action? Has not every home in the Anglo-Saxon world in which "Pilgrim's Progress" has been read and reread as a religious classic been brought into a surer cohesion by reason of its author's supreme allegiance to Christ?

When a student takes the position that his supreme loyalty is not to his university but to Jesus Christ, does his university lose by such an allegiance? Does it lose any great intellectual or spiritual value for which a university is supposed to stand? Financial support it may lose. But what shall it profit a university if it gain millions for buildings or for endowment, and lose its own soul—its opportunity for real intellectual leadership? Popular approval it may lose. But if a university, even in the face of popular passion—the spirit of the mob—may not maintain freedom of discussion and freedom of conscience, what moral right has it

to live? *No, when a student takes the position that his supreme loyalty must be loyalty to some high and challenging ideal, his university gains in respect of all those truly cultural values which universities exist to foster.*

And when some patriot takes the position that his supreme loyalty is not to his country, but to Jesus Christ, does his country suffer by such an allegiance? Only the unthinking man will ever say that it does.

"He who loves not his home and country which he has seen, how can he love humanity in general which he has not seen?" So asks Dean Inge. And he adds: "There are, after all, few emotions of which one has less reason to be ashamed than the little lump which the Englishman feels when he first catches sight of the white cliffs of Dover." A statement which you and I, applauding, might amend so as to read—"which the returning American feels when he first catches sight of the Statue of Liberty."

When some man expresses a chivalric concern for the welfare of women, we are entitled to know how great is his devotion to that particular woman who has taken him for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health till death do them part. And when some man expresses a comprehensive concern for the welfare of mankind, we are entitled to know how much he is doing for that particular portion of mankind which constitutes the community in which he lives.

But if it does not follow that because a man's supreme allegiance is to Jesus Christ, his own family through him is going to suffer, neither does it follow that because a man's supreme allegiance is to the kingdom of God his own country through him is going to suffer. The supreme allegiance of Socrates was not to Athens but to truth; wherefore, he insisted, his fellow-citizens, instead of punishing him, ought to maintain him at public expense.

How utterly superficial the notion that in order to be loyal to her husband a wife must endorse everything her husband says or does! Must she not sometimes, if she is to be truly loyal to him, take exception to what he says, and disapprove of what he does? And is not equally superficial the notion that in order to be loyal to one's country one must endorse everything that one's country has ever done, is doing, or contemplates doing? Was either Ulysses S. Grant or Abraham Lincoln disloyal to his country when he condemned our war with Mexico? Was Lloyd George disloyal to his country when he condemned, in the very midst of it, her war with South Africa? Was Carl Liebnicht disloyal to his country when he condemned the invasion of Belgium, and the whole position of Germany's militaristic and imperialistic group?

When some man takes the position that loyalty to country involves unquestioning approval of everything that his country does, does he not take a position in which he is utterly powerless to save his country from policies that have in them the seeds of disaster? If a man really loves his country, if he sincerely desires his

country's welfare, must he not take the position that his supreme loyalty is not to country, but to Christ—to truth, to justice, to humanity, to God? *As each Sunday morning, on every battleship in the United States navy, above even that dear flag which symbolizes native land, there is hoisted that white flag which symbolizes the kingdom of God, must not every truly loyal American, in his own soul, place the white flag above every other?*

From any man who does take that position, what has his country to fear? Is he the kind of man who goes profiteering in war time? Is he the kind of man who puts rotten leather in shoes that are to be worn by soldiers? Is he the kind of man who is willing to misrepresent the amount of income tax he owes to his government? Is he the kind of man who in Washington, today, would be suspected by anybody to be involved in an oil scandal? Or a fight-film scandal? Or a veteran's bureau scandal? Or any other kind of scandal? Men who swear allegiance to high ideals are not always wise. Their judgment, I mean, is not always faultless. But, when all is said, are they the men of whom their country has reason to feel afraid? Are not they just the men on whom their country may confidently rely?

He who loves his father or mother more than Christ is not only unworthy of Christ, he is unworthy of his father and mother. He who loves his university more than Christ is not only unworthy of Christ, he is unworthy of his university. He who loves his country more than Christ is not only unworthy of Christ, he is unworthy of his country. *The higher loyalty, far from betraying the lesser loyalty, is the one thing in all the world that can guarantee the lesser loyalty!*

II.

But now, having stressed this fact, I must, in all candor, call attention to another fact—for increasing numbers of persons a peculiarly torturing fact—namely, that the higher loyalty and the lesser loyalties do sometimes seem to clash. I have said that to the question, “Do you confess Christ as your Lord and Master?” we who are gathered here this morning would feel that there is for us but one answer—“I do.” In our heart of hearts we really want to be supremely loyal to Jesus Christ. But we are dwelling in the midst of a civilization that is semi-pagan. We live and move and have our being in a world that does not, on the whole, accept, much less practice, the principles of Jesus. We are citizens of a state that is less than Christian. *How, then, is it going to be possible for us to discharge the duties of citizenship in a less than Christian state; to live and labor in a world where hideously unchristian deeds are not only done but commanded; to dwell in the midst of a semi-pagan civilization, and maintain, through everything, our loyalty to Christ?*

That is the question which confronts many a modern business man who deep down in his heart endorses, and enthusiastically applauds, the ethical teachings of Jesus but who, each Monday morning, as he returns to his office, finds it immensely difficult to apply them. He holds, let us suppose, a subordinate position in some large mercantile or manufacturing establishment. And every once in a while he is asked to do, or at least to approve, something which he simply cannot reconcile with the teachings of Jesus. But how, oh how, shall he solve his moral problem? If he gives up this position, where will he go to find another position in which he may be free to hold fast his allegiance to Christ?

This moral problem becomes excruciatingly difficult when a Christian is ordered by a less than Christian state, in a semi-pagan world, to take up arms against his fellows. I do not happen to know anything about the officer in charge of the submarine which discharged the torpedo that sank the *Lusitania*. But let us just suppose this morning that in his heart of hearts he wanted to be loyal to Jesus Christ. He received an order from his government to sink a ship carrying munitions—and women and children. What should he have done? In time of war, a man who really desires to be loyal to Jesus Christ may be ordered to bomb a city, or to explode poison gas shells over it, or to foul its water-supply, or to cut off its food supply, or (it is now hinted) to release disease germs in it, or in some other fiendish way to inflict suffering, not only upon men, but upon women and children. What, under such circumstances, should a Christian do? When Christ says, "Treat every man as a brother," and the state says, "Treat certain men as your enemies"; when Christ says, "Maintain toward every man an attitude of good-will," and the state says that good-will toward enemies is not permissible, what should a Christian do?

Now this, I think, is a question which every modern disciple of Jesus ought to be putting to his own soul. It is a question which, in my judgment, cannot longer be evaded. And it is a question which every follower of Christ will have to answer for himself. You cannot answer it for me. I cannot answer it for you. No man may answer it for his brother. If some disciple of Jesus comes to the conclusion that, in the event of another war, there is but one thing for him to do, and that is to serve his country by bearing arms, it is not for me, or for any other man, to say to him that in that case he will cease to be a Christian. And if some disciple of Jesus comes to the conclusion that, in the event of another war, he must, in some way, serve his country, but that he cannot, under any circumstances, consent to bear arms, to kill, to inflict suffering upon women and children, it is not for me, or for any man, to say to him that, in that case, he will cease to be a Christian.

Certainly, let me add, *it is not for the Christian church to discourage any of her sons or daughters who are making earnest, and even agonizing, efforts to be loyal to Jesus Christ.* Whatever attitude the state may

feel obliged to take toward the "conscientious objector," the Christian church ought not to make more difficult his already terribly difficult path. If the state decides that in the interest of public safety he should be sent to jail, the church cannot keep him out; but the church can, and should, let him feel that he possesses her profoundest respect for his brave allegiance to what seems to him to be the command of Christ.

As for the church herself, I, for my part, feel very sure that she ought never again, in her official capacity, to bless war. She cannot dictate to her sons and daughters how they shall solve their moral problem. She must not, in my judgment, attempt to legislate in respect of a matter which concerns so vitally the individual conscience. But this one thing she may do. *She may refuse to call holy that which is hideous. She may refuse to call right that which is wrong.* She may humbly confess her own share of the awful failure to prevent war. But by what kind of moral hocus pocus may she justify her shame? Let the church never assume a holier than thou attitude. But, in the name of truth, let her never again say that black is white. And, in the name of Christ, let her never again officially participate in an orgy of killing and hate. *Let her keep herself in some truly and nobly Christian sense "above the battle"—above the massacre and the madness—so that anguished men and women on both sides of the conflict may know that there is, in a mad-house world, at least one great organization that is keeping sane and calm and kind and Christ-like; and by that knowledge be comforted and sustained and filled with hope.*

If, in the event of another war, the church should maintain an attitude such as this, is it not at least possible that, at the close of the war, she could influence, for the good of all, the terms of peace?

III.

There is, I think, still another fact to which attention needs to be called. I have said that the problem presented at this present time to a thoroughly Christian conscience is a truly terrible one. I have said that it is a problem which each disciple of Jesus must solve for himself. Now let me suggest that in order that he may have a fair chance to solve it; in order, indeed, that the whole world may have a fair chance to find some way out of the awful situation which now confronts it, *there must be full freedom of discussion even in respect to the moral legitimacy of existing laws of the land.* So long as any law stands, he who violates it must be prepared to pay the penalty. But to take the position that, once a law has been passed, it is not permissible even to question its moral legitimacy, is to take a position which, if it could be maintained, would stop moral progress forever.

Fortunately, for those of us who live in America, the very constitution of our government guarantees freedom of discussion. Its first amendment reads: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or of the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances." *How very inconsistent the position of persons who demand a one hundred per cent loyalty to the constitution of the United States and then try to limit freedom of discussion!*

But quite apart from this constitutional guarantee, would it not be a bad day for America if the state should attempt to dictate to its teachers what they shall teach, or to its preachers what they shall preach? Would not such a situation prove as intolerable in America as it proved in Russia and in Germany? Would it not turn out to be as dangerous for America as it was for Russia and for Germany?

If the universities of America ever turn over their intellects into the keeping of the state, they will be as powerless to guide the people of America as were the universities of Germany to guide the people of Germany. If the churches of America ever turn over their consciences into the keeping of the state, they will be as powerless to save the people of America as were the churches of Germany to save the people of Germany. During the war, and immediately after it, how many times we put the question: "Why did not the people of Germany rise up against their military masters?" But is it not the answer to this question just the very significant fact that the people of Germany were kept in ignorance by their masters; that they were denied by their masters any chance either to know, or to discuss, political truth? *God forbid that America should ever adopt those methods of terrorism and of oppression which drove Germany into ruin such as has befallen no other nation in modern times.*

I remember hearing one of my professors in the theological school relate an experience which he had in Germany about twenty years ago. He had made some remark a bit derogatory to the Kaiser. His remark was overheard and reported to the police. A kind friend gave him a tip that he was about to be arrested. He took the next train to the coast, crossed the channel, hurried up to London, and went to Hyde Park, where, as he said, he might "cuss" the king to his heart's content. I used to tell this story during the war in order to illustrate the difference between the German method and the British method. I believed then, and I believe now, that the British method was far, far better than the German method. In England, for generations, men have claimed and exercised freedom of discussion. Has freedom of discussion made England weak? No, *freedom of discussion has made the English government one of the strongest and most stable govern-*

ments in all the world. Think of a nation passing from a tory government to a labor government without a financial crash!

And now, are we Americans, at this late hour, going to adopt the discredited and discarded German method? We who sing

My country 'tis of thee,
Sweet land of liberty?

Are we going to renounce our political heritage? Are we going to repudiate our own political history? Are we going to say, "Our fathers brought forth upon this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty"; but we, their sons, have become afraid of liberty?

"With a great sum," said a Roman freedman, to a Christian missionary, "obtained I this freedom." And the missionary proudly replied, "But I am free born." With a great sum our fathers obtained 'this freedom' which we, free-born Americans, up until now have enjoyed. Back of the American Revolution is the English Revolution. And back of the English Revolution is that great charter, a copy of which may be seen today in the British Museum, "injured by age and fire but with the royal seal still hanging from the shriveled parchment"—that Magna Charta of Anglo-Saxon liberties. With a great sum obtained they this freedom—John Eliot, John Hampton, John Pym, John Hancock, George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, Alexander Hamilton, Thomas Jefferson. May God forbid that now, in days of passion and panic, we should throw away so great and precious and costly a heritage. *Freedom of discussion we must claim and exercise if either as individuals, or as a nation, we are to have any real chance to solve our most momentous problems.*

And now, for one brief, closing moment let us return to the thought, with which we started, that our supreme loyalty is to Jesus Christ. If our profession of Christianity amounts to anything, each of us in his own way, but each of us in some way, must strive to crown him Lord of all. It is hardly to be expected that we shall all choose the same way of trying to rid the world of its grèatest existing curse—the curse of war and of the whole war system. But, in Christ's name, let us choose some way! How dare we, as Christians, remain passive while forces are generating to hurl the world into another catastrophe unimaginably awful? How dare we let governments blunder along into another abyss through lack of moral initiative? Is it not for Christians, of all people, to furnish moral initiative? To take with respect to war a position *in advance* of the average conscience, and then by unsleeping educational effort bring the long-suffering, because uninformed, masses of mankind to the point where they will demand that war be placed in the same category with dueling, piracy, and slavery?

Then, but not until then, will loyalty to Christ no longer clash with loyalty to Caesar. For then, church and state will together stand at the feet of Jesus, and crown him Lord of all.

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